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AUTHOR Schnoor, Larry
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ABSTRACT

Established in 1874, the Interstate Oratorical Association (IOA) represents the nation's oldest competitive collegiate speaking association. It is now composed of collegiate speaking associations in 19 states. Begun by three student members of the Adelphi Society at Knox College, the IOA held its first contest on February 27, 1874 at the Opera House in Galesburg, Illinois, and completed plans for a permanent organization on June 9 of that year. An annual contest has been held every year since then The contest had one division and each state was represented by a single orator until 1936, when separate divisions were initiated for men and women. In 1974, the IOA voted to return the contest to a single division format. Contest winners were awarded monetary gifts until 1953, when IOA voted to give medals and certificates instead. The site of the IOA annual contest rotated among member states until 1984, when the Association voted to consider site location based on the merits of the bids presented. Several books have been published listing the speeches of the winners of the IOA contest throughout the years. Between 1908 and the early 1930s, each college was responsible for publishing its winning speeches but in 1934, the IOA took over this task and has since continued to publish all of the orations presented in "Winning Orations." Many contestants in the IOA contests have gone on to establish themselves meritoriously in a number of professions, including law, education, religion, and speech communication. (Specific individuals and their accomplishments are cited.) (JD)

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HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE INTERSTATE ORATORICAL ASSOCIATION

1873-1984

Larry Schnoor

Paper presented at

Speech Communication Association Convention
Palmer House
Chicago, Illinois
November, 1984

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HISTORY

By Larry Schnoor

The Interstate Oratorical Association is an organization composed of state collegiate oratorical associations in 19 states. Established in 1874, it is the oldest competitive collegiate speaking association in the nation. The purpose of the Association is to conduct annual contests in the branch of forensics known as oratory, in which a participant prepares a manuscript speech and presents the speech largely from memory. The participants are the winners of their respective state contests; thus, in a sense, each state winner represents all of the member colleges of his state.

The history of the Association began in 1873 when three student members of the Adelphi Society of Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois, discussed the possibility of establishing a contest in oratory. Their first intention was that contestants would come from only Monmouth, Knox, and Abingdon Colleges. During the course of their discussion, the concept was enlarged to include participants from colleges in the neighboring states. Invitations were sent to colleges in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa. The final representation was as follows: Beloit College, Wisconsin; Iowa College (presently Grinnell) and Iowa State University, Iowa; Chicago University and Monmouth College, Illinois. It was decided that Knox College would not have an orator because the promoters thought a person in his own city would have the sympathy of the audience and thus have an advantage.

The invitation from the Adelphi Society was addressed to both faculty and students of the respective colleges and contained the particulars of the contest. Each school was to furnish one orator and

the Governor of each state was to select one man to be a member of the awarding committee. Each judge was to take into consideration excellence of thought, style of composition, and delivery. Each contestant was to be marked on a scale of ten. The person receiving the highest average mark was to be awarded the first prize and the one receiving the next highest, the second prize. The prizes consisted of $100 and $75 respectively and were offered by the Adelphi Society. The Society also agreed to pay the railroad fare of the contestants to and from Galesburg.

The first contest was held on February 27, 1874, at the Opera House in Galesburg, Illinois. It was probably the first intercollegiate contest in oratory ever held in the United States. The contest was evidently a well-planned social affair as well as an oratorical contest. Descriptions of the event mention that an orchestra of thirty pieces furnished music and a banquet was given by the Adelphi Society for the visiting delegates and orators.

The plans for a permanent organization of the Interstate Oratorical Association were completed and perfected at a meeting held in Chicago, June 9, 1874. An annual contest has been held every year since.

During the years 1874-1936, there was a single division of the contest. Each state was represented by a single orator. A majority of the contestants were men but in 1876, Miss Laura A. Kent, Antioch College, represented the State of Ohio and placed second in the contest. Mrs. E. Jean Nelson, DePauw University, represented the State of Indiana in 1892 and was awarded first place. In 1924, Miss Edith Hootman, Transylvania College of Kentucky, was second in the contest.

In 1936 it was decided to hold two divisions--one for men and one for women. The separate divisions continued until 1973. At the business meeting of its centennial contest held at Mankato State College, Mankato, Minnesota, on May 3-4, 1973, the Association voted to return to

a single division with each state to be represented by the top two orators selected at the various state contests.

The prizes presented to the winners of the contest have undergone numerous changes since their inception in 1874. The monetary awards continued until 1953 when it was decided to discontinue them. In the place of such awards, certificates and medals have been awarded to the winners. This practice still continues. The monetary awards were supplemented for a time during the late 1930's and early 1940's by a cash gift donated by Dr. Frederic Bancroft of the Metropolitan Club, Washington, D.C. His gift was contributed in memory of his brother, E.A. Bancroft, who won the Interstate contest in 1878 as a representative of Knox College and later was the United States Ambassador to Japan.

The site of the annual contest rotated among cities in the states belonging to the Association. In 1941 it settled at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. It remained at Northwestern until 1957 when it moved for a four year period to Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. In 1961 it returned to Northwestern and remained there until 1965, when it moved to Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. In 1970 a rotation system was again adopted by the Association and the yearly contest was held in odd numbered years in a Central location and alternates in the even years between East and West locations. At the annual meeting in 1984, the Association voted to end the rotation system and to consider site location based upon the merits of the bids presented.

In 1891, Charles Prather published the book, Winning Orations, which contained the first and second place speeches of the Association for the years 1874 through 1890. A second volume, edited by Prather and J.E. Groves was published in 1907, containing the speeches from 1891 to 1907. From 1908 until the early 1930's, each state or college was responsible

for the publication of its respective winning speeches. For a few years thereafter the copyright privileges was granted to Noble and Noble. In 1934 the Association took over the publication of the winning speeches and has continued publishing all of the orations presented at its annual contests in Winning Orations.

Contestants in the Interstate Oratorical Association contests have gone on to establish themselves meritoriously in a number of professions. The professions of law, education and religion are the most numerous. It would be impossible to enumerate all of the accomplishments of former contestants. A representative sample of the alumni of the Association include such individuals as follows:

E.A. Bancroft, United States Ambassador to Japan; first place in 1878, Knox College.

Robert M. LaFollette, United States Senator, Wisconsin; first place in 1879, University of Wisconsin.

Albert J. Beveridge, United States Senator, Indiana; first place in 1885, DePauw University.

John H. Finley, College President and Associate Editor, New York Times; first place in 1887, Knox College.

Edwin Holt Hughes, Bishop, Methodist Episcopal Church; first place in 1889, Ohio Wesleyan University.

Otto A. Hauerbach (Harbach). Author and Playwright; first place in 1895, Knox College.

Perl D. Decker, Congressman, Missouri; first place in 1897, Park College.

Ray Ehrensperger, College Dean; first place in 1928; Wabash College.

Hans J. Hillerbrand, College Dean; first place in 1952, Goshen College.

Joan Reidy (Heggen), Mayor; first place in 1953, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire.

George J. Worden, Public Relations Director; first place in 1958, Oklahoma State University.

It should be noted that contestants not reaching first place have also gone on to great accomplishment. In 1946, Senator George S.

McGovern was the contestant representing Dakota Wesleyan University and the state of South Dakota. The third place winner in 1951 was Guy Vander Jagt, present Congressman from Michigan, representing Hope College. Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., former Executive Director of the National Urban League represented DePauw University and the State of Indiana in the 1954 contest, placing third to Ralph Zimmerman's famous speech, "Mingled Blood."

A number of former, as well as current, individuals known for their contributions to the speech field, and more specifically to forensics, were also contestants. Jack Rhodes, Director of Forensics at Augustana College in Sioux Falls and former President of the AFA was a contestant in 1963. In 1947, Mac Cripe was a contestant and Ray DeBoer, a contestant in 1935. Each of these individuals have had students of their own at the Interstate, carrying on the tradition begun in 1874.

The records of the Association indicate that the only instance of relatives achieving first place in the contest happened in 1902 and 1903. Oscar E. Maurer, representing Beloit College and Wisconsin in the 1902 contest and Washington Irving Maurer, representing the college and state in 1903 each received first place. The inception of the separate division for women in 1936 created the possibility that both the male and female winners could be from the same school. The only instance of this happened at the centennial contest in 1973 when Tony Vehar and Judy A. Sturgis of Eastern Michigan received first place in their respective divisions. Ironically, it was the last time such an event could occur with the return to a single division in the 1974 contest. The only instance of relatives competing in the same contest happened in 1976 when John and Michael Rindo, students from the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, represented the state of Wisconsin. John Rindo was awarded first place, with Michael receiving second place.

The Interstate Oratorical Association clearly has added to the development of oratory during the Association's first one hundred years. With the legacy of its accomplishments and those of its alumni, the Association should be well founded to begin its second century.